



Date of Meeting: 7 April 2011

Named Award: Master of Arts
Programme Title: Master of Arts in Journalism with New Media
Award Type: Masters Degree
Award Class: Major
NFQ Level: 9
Intakes Commencing: September 2011
ECTS/ACCS Credits: 90

PANEL MEMBERS

Name
Mr Brian Trench, (formerly) DCU
Ms Niamh Ward, Rathmines College of Further Education
Mr Michael O'Mahony, Journalist (formerly of Thomas Crosbie Holdings)
Mr Eoin English, News Reporter, Irish Examiner
Ms Eva Juhl, Institutional Review Facilitator, CIT

PROPOSING TEAM MEMBERS

Name
Ms Orla Flynn, Head of Crawford College of Art & Design
Ms Rose McGrath, Head of Department of Media Communications
Mr Frank O'Donovan, Course Coordinator & Lecturer, Department of Media Communications
Mr Paul Green, Senior Lecturer, Department of Media Communications
Mr Emmett Coffey, Lecturer, Department of Media Communications
Ms Marie Toft, Lecturer, Department of Media Communications
Mr Gearóid Ó Súilleabháin, Lecturer, DEIS (Department of Educational Development)

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME

This taught Master of Arts programme is proposed by the Department of Media Communications at CIT Crawford College of Art & Design.

The programme has been developed from the department's established offerings in Public Relations and Multimedia, with the addition of seven new modules focused on journalism practice and theory.

FINDINGS OF THE PANEL

1. General Findings

*NOTE: In this report, the term “Requirement” is used to indicate an action or amendment which in the view of the Panel **must** be undertaken prior to commencement of the Programme. The term “Recommendation” indicates an item to which the Institute/Academic Council/Course Board should give serious consideration for implementation at an early stage and which should be the subject of on-going monitoring.*

The Panel commends the programme team on the innovative programme proposal, on the documentation provided and on its lively engagement in the discussion during the validation meeting.

The Panel has considered the programme as presented to it in the programme documentation and discussion with the proposers, and this report presents the Panel’s findings, 4 requirements and 19 recommendations.

2. Validation Criteria

The Panel has considered the documentation provided and has discussed the programme with the proposers. The Panel has concluded that the programme meets the required standards in the field of study at Level 9 of the National Framework.

With regard to the CIT Validation Criteria:

2.1 Is there a convincing need for the programme with a viable level of applications?

YES. The programme teams envisages an initial intake of 10-12 in the first year (which the Institute is happy to support), growing to 18-20 in subsequent years. The department has had a high level of enquiries about the potential programme and its expected start-up date.

While there is no dedicated Level 8 feeder programme in CIT, the Panel notes that the MA programme will appeal to graduates from a wide range of disciplines.

The department acknowledges that intake to the new MA programme may encroach on the cohort available for its PR Masters programme. The department will need to strongly market both programmes and clearly show the difference between the two to attract the appropriate cohort to each.

Recommendation 1: The programme documentation should highlight the diversity of outlets for potential graduates of the programme, whilst also acknowledging the challenging current climate in terms of journalism employment opportunities. In seeking to address the latter, the emphasis in the programme should be on skills that are widely transferrable across a number of sectors.

Recommendation 2: The programme content should emphasise the “new media” aspect of the programme which differentiates it from other journalism programmes and make the case for professionalization of work in new media.

2.2 Are the level and type of the proposed award appropriate?

YES. The Programme Outcomes and module learning outcomes are appropriate for a Level 9 Masters degree.

2.3 Is the learning experience of an appropriate level, standard and quality?

YES. The Panel cautions against over-emphasising the practical elements of the programme content, which may result in essential Level 9 theoretical learning being diminished somewhat.

Requirement 1: The Panel advises that the course rationale should be refined with a view to ensuring an appropriate balance between the theoretical and practical elements of the programme. It should be clearly seen that the programme not only fills a gap in media skills training, but also in developing an understanding of the implications for journalism of new media developments.

2.4 Is the programme structure logical and well designed (including procedures for access, transfer and progression)?

YES. Flexible modes of delivery will be considered in the future as demand dictates. The department notes that several enquiries have already been made by prospective students who would like to continue in full-time employment while undertaking the programme.

Recommendation 3: The option of flexible modes of delivery should be mentioned in the promotional literature, as these would be advantageous for working journalists.

Recommendation 4: The standard Level 9 entry requirement should be stated, i.e. Honours Bachelor Degree with a minimum achievement of 2nd class honours. The Panel notes that this will only determine eligibility to apply for the programme. Ultimate admission to the programme will be based on a selection process which will comprise a portfolio of writings/broadcast pieces as well as an interview.

Recommendation 5: The Panel advises against identifying specific feeder programmes or referring to qualification in a “relevant” subject in the promotional/application literature, as this could deter suitable potential students. The Panel considers that the combination of portfolio and interview should be sufficient to assess an applicant’s suitability. With regard to the interview, it is essential that a clear marking scheme is agreed in advance which would provide a clear picture of the suitability of an applicant. It would also be essential to clearly state the basis for admission in the programme literature supplied to potential applicants.

Recommendation 6: It should also be stated that non-standard applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. CIT has an established RPL policy which will be used as an entry mechanism with the appropriate level of exemptions being granted for formal and experiential learning (especially for those working as Journalists).

2.5 Are the programme management structures adequate?

YES. A Programme Management Board will operate in line with the Institute’s Academic Quality System, and will have student representatives. The actual composition of the board will be decided upon once the programme is validated.

The department’s strong links with Thomas Crosbie Holdings can be called upon to enlist professional journalists to contribute to the programme.

2.6 Are the resource requirements reasonable?

YES. The Panel commends the high standard of the existing studio and computer lab resources within the department which will be available to the proposed cohort.

It is noted that the additional teaching hours required for the programme have been approved from September 2011.

The existing library resources are not adequate for the proposed programme and will need to be enhanced. The Panel also notes that the budget allocation proposed for additions to the library stock is quite modest and may not allow for acquisition of all necessary library resources.

Requirement 2: The programme team should ensure that all books identified in module descriptors as recommended reading and any identified more than once as supplementary reading are acquired, including multiple copies of books that are considered to be core texts and/or are recommended reading in more than one module.

Recommendation 7: Current access to JSTOR is restricted to Irish journals only. The Panel recommends that this should be extended internationally. Also, online subscriptions should be acquired for leading journals in journalism education, journalism studies and new media studies; these subject areas are significantly under-represented in the CIT Libraries’ journal holdings.

2.7 Will the impact of the programme on the Institute be positive?

YES. The Panel is confident that this new offering will enhance the suite of programmes offered by the Department of Media Communications, and will fulfil the need for a dedicated postgraduate journalism programme in the region.

3. Programme Structure

The Panel notes that the programme structure had already been the subject of external peer evaluation at an earlier QA stage.

In exercising its brief to consider the overall structure of the programmes, the Panel wishes to add the following observations:

3.1 Timetable

Contact hours for the programme will be 15 hrs for Sem. 1, and 16.5 hrs for Sem. 2. While timetabling constraints are an ongoing issue, it is envisaged that lectures will be restricted to 3 or 3.5 days per week where possible.

Recommendation 8: With a view to attracting students in employment, the workload and indicative timetable should be spelled out in the promotional literature.

3.2 Work Experience

The Panel notes that the programme as proposed would be one of the few journalism programmes without a formal work placement module/element.

Requirement 3: While guest lectures and media industry visits will outline to students the demands of the workplace, the Panel proposes that a (minimum) one-week placement OR professional experience (freelance) portfolio be incorporated into one of the two assessment elements of the Masters project. Appropriate supervision mechanisms need to be ensured for work placement elements.

4. Modules

The Panel notes that the new draft modules have been the subject of internal and external scrutiny by the CIT Module Moderator and external reviewers.

In exercising its brief to consider the overall standard and appropriateness of modules, the Panel wishes to add the following observations:

4.1 Various Modules: Module Sharing

Some modules are shared across several cohorts of students. While this adds a new dimension to the modules' delivery and widens the scope for engaging debate, the Panel notes that this can result in a module content being spread too broadly to suit all cohorts.

4.2 Various Modules: Numeric Sequencing of Module Titles

In general, module titles should convey the module content. Instances of "Module 1" and "Module 2" (such as remain in *Broadcast Journalism 1* and *Broadcast Journalism 2*) should be avoided.

4.3 Various Modules: Integration of Journalism and New Media

The references to journalism in descriptors of multimedia modules are weak, as is the integration of new-media dimensions in journalism modules. The Panel noted that several of the approved multimedia modules are under review and advises that this opportunity might be taken to achieve a higher level of integration between the various programme elements.

4.4 Various Modules: Module Descriptions

A number of module descriptions promise the modules will provide "in-depth knowledge", "expert knowledge", "comprehensive knowledge" or similar, while at the same time indicating the module will cover a broad range of topics.

Recommendation 9: The Panel advises that more appropriate and realistic terms should be found for stating these objectives.

4.5 Various Modules: Assessment Breakdown

In *News Reporting* and *Broadcast Journalism 2*, the Coursework Breakdown adds up to total of 100% of the module mark. However, the overall Assessment Breakdown of the module is given as 70% Coursework and 30% End-of-Semester Formal Examination.

Requirement 4: The Panel asks that the modules be revised to achieve the correct breakdown of assessment elements.

4.6 Various Modules: Resource Listings

Recommendation 10: The resources sections of all modules should be revisited to ensure that any relevant Irish literature is included, and that missing details (such as year of publication) are supplied.

4.7 Module: Media Law

Recommendation 11: The proposed Law module, while being delivered by the School of Business in CIT, should cover specific media topics, in particular communication ethics. The Panel recommends that the programme team should enlist a Media Law expert as a guest speaker to enhance the module delivery.

4.8 Module: Cybercultures

Recommendation 12: The content of this module should be kept under constant revision to ensure appropriate integration of emerging practices and technologies.

4.9 Module: Multimedia Design

Recommendation 13: In any revision of the module, the learning outcomes should be revisited so that they relate equally as well to Journalism as they do to PR, i.e. more emphasis on video production and editing. Any such revision would need to be carried out in consultation with the Module Moderator.

4.10 Module: Studio Technology

There is considerable overlap in some of the material covered in the four multimedia modules. It is noted that the *Studio Technology* module is pre-approved for delivery in the CIT Cork School of Music.

Recommendation 14: The programme team should reconsider the inclusion of this particular module as the content, if required at all, should be delivered much earlier in the programme. The Panel suggests that this module could be designated as an elective, thereby making room for alternative, more relevant, elective modules drawn from existing programme offerings, e.g. ethics, entrepreneurship, further modules from cognate programmes, and Free Choice.

4.11 Module: Broadcast Journalism 1

Recommendation 15: The module title could be revisited to focus the delivery on news practices, similarly to the changes effected to modules originally titled *Print Journalism*. The learning outcomes should also be reworded, as they are very ambitious as stated, notably learning outcome no. 5 which could be the cornerstone of much of the programme.

4.12 Module: Broadcast Journalism 2

Recommendation 16: The module title could be revisited to focus explicitly on current affairs and documentary. The numerical sequencing of both *Broadcast Journalism* modules should be dropped. The articulation with (as currently named) *Broadcast Journalism 1* should be refined; *Broadcast Journalism 2* refers to teaching basics in audio-visual techniques that belong more appropriately in *Broadcast Journalism 1*.

4.13 Module: Masters Project

Recommendation 17: The 30-credit project is to be submitted in September. The Panel recommends that the individual project ideas should be developed by students as early as possible in the programme. The deliverables and scale of the project should be clearly defined in the module content.

4.14 Module: News Reporting

Recommendation 18: The Panel suggests that this module could be renamed *News Writing and Editing* and the content adjusted accordingly. The content and associated workload are quite onerous as stated; it is suggested that the final three elements of the Indicative Content could be moved to the *Industry Context* or *Media History & Structure* modules.

4.15 Module: Media Design Industry Context

Recommendation 19: The Panel suggests that this module be renamed *Media Industry Contexts* in order to open up exploration of news media working environments.

5. Conclusions

Subject to implementation of the requirements above, and with due regard to the recommendations made, the Panel recommends the proposed programme for validation by the Academic Council of Cork Institute of Technology.